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PRELIMINARY REPORT OF COMMITTEE R ON THE PROMOTION OF RESEARCH IN COL- LEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

[Presented at the Annual Meeting, Baltimore, December 28, 1918.]

The Committee on Research, whose questionnaire was published in the May BULLETIN, 1918, p. 7, offers the following tentative report:

It is abundantly clear that research in the natural sciences that have an immediate practical bearing has been stimulated by the war. Now that the war is over and the period of reconstruction has begun, this will doubtless have an effect on our universities, whose administrations do not need to be reminded that a physicist or a chemist or a botanist can accomplish little of permanent value unless the opportunities for original work are not only maintained but enlarged. The public itself has been made aware as never before that investigations in physics, in chemistry, in agriculture, in medicine are indispensable to human welfare; and it is improbable that any of these subjects will lack either funds or facilities for research work.

To a considerable extent, this is true also of such branches of study as economics, sociology and history. The money and the labor questions, the problems involved in the reorganization of society, the ethnology and history of European nations, the "causes of the war," and so on are too important to permit of indifference or neglect on the part of our universities.

On the other hand, the humanistic subjects, which include of course those aspects of history, law, etc., that do not bear directly on the problems of reconstruction, run a far greater danger. Where the subject has a utilitarian, practical aspect—for example, modern languages—the tendency will probably be to "investigate" that phase of it which can be made pedagogically available. In this respect, the attention now given to research in *phonetics* in many places is doubtless symptomatic. The British Parliamentary Report of the Committee on Modern Languages shows the direction in which the pendulum will probably swing. Nevertheless, who will be so bold as to affirm that one subject possesses a practical value and another not, however utilitarian the former may seem? We can no more afford to neglect the past than we can the present, if our information is to be sound. The value of knowledge will naturally vary in kind and degree, although when and to what extent it will be practically useful, no one can possibly predict. Our Secretary of State has recently said:

In a conflict so universal as to involve the whole earth, new impulses of human action have been set in motion, not only in the political, industrial and commercial spheres, but in the structure of society and the spiritual life of mankind. . . . With all this we must reckon.

Obviously the "spiritual life of mankind," if it means anything, signifies everything that has contributed to make it what it is, and here Greek and Latin, Sanskrit and Hebrew, ancient as well as mediaeval and modern history, Egyptology, Russian, etc., are concerned.

The Committee wishes, therefore, to reaffirm the fact that research in all branches of knowledge is indispensable, particularly so now when it behooves mankind to view its problems more than ever *sub specie aeternitatis*. The Committee believes that the liberating quality of research is "an intuition or an axiom"—to modify slightly the statement of one of its members. And to this no subject of graduate study can properly be considered an exception. In no way whatsoever should the purely professional or pedagogic aims of our colleges and universities be allowed to discourage or curtail research work.

But the Committee is agreed that the boundaries of graduate work need closer definition. Not in all respects, nor in all universities, is the work of the investigator properly guarded against the encroachments of the utilitarian or professional interest. In many subjects this condition is perhaps inevitable, since the student is primarily bent on preparing himself for the exercise of a profession in which research can have but a comparatively slight part. A strong argument can be made that most professional training is not only benefited by but also contingent upon some practice in original investigation; certainly in courses of study leading to the Doctor's Degree, training in research is a *sine qua non*. It is clear, however, that graduate work of the highest type depends for its success ultimately on the individual professor and the student co-operating productively. The real graduate school has as its object investigation. Whether the research is done in "a course" or "a seminar" or by means of private consultation between the professor and the student, is here beside the question. In any case two essential conditions are necessary: (1) only those qualified by ability and interest should undertake investigation, and (2) the universities should recognize fully the claims of productive scholarship to opportunities and freedom of work. Both conditions, clearly, apply to student and professor alike.

The first of these conditions is a question of principle, whereas both are questions of administration. We all know how difficult it is to carry on an investigation with ill-qualified students or with groups of students, some of whom are either not qualified or not interested. In order to be effective, research must be conducted as an aim-in-itself, and quality not quantity is the important factor. Most of our universities will readily admit this to be true;

some may regard it even as axiomatic. The chairman is acquainted with a department (in a scientific subject) in which the last year of the graduate work consists exclusively of research, under the personal supervision of the professor with whom the student is working and under excellent material conditions. But is this not the exception rather than the rule? And how often it does happen that the administration questions the value of a course, not to say of the professor, merely because the number of students is small and the subject-matter seems abstruse. Doubtless some subjects are better off in this respect than others. The natural sciences, as indicated, seem to fare best. And yet a member of the Committee representing the sciences complains of "the ceaseless grind of tread-mill laboratory work, which . . . the student has to toil through before research is open to him. This would be all right if it were really disciplinary, but it is not; it is for the most part purely mechanical . . . our universities ought in some way to provide for the exceptional person in such fashion as not completely to kill all originality and initiative." Statistics on such matters are very hard to get; at least such statistics as will reveal the true conditions. But it is hardly an exaggeration to say that in many subjects, notably the humanities, the universities still treat the graduate student (even in his second or third year's work) essentially as an advanced "undergraduate" by planning for him courses that are purely informational and not deliberately productive in their nature. It would be folly to attempt to lay down any hard and fast rule in such matters, or to generalize from one or two cases. But it should be useful to point out the fact and to suggest a corrective. And the corrective is the fuller recognition than is the case at present of the *selective principle* for graduate work. Our university administrations should by every means possible, official and other, encourage the professor to work with *select* bodies of students. In more branches than at present the professor in charge of graduate work should be made to feel that this is his first and main duty or function.

As for the second of the above conditions, it will evidently be difficult or indeed impossible to put the selective principle into operation unless our universities draw a sharper line between undergraduate and graduate students as such. In fact, it might be well to distinguish three classes: (1) undergraduates; (2) professional students; (3) graduate students. However that may be—and it is again impossible to legislate *en bloc* as to how much research work, if any, the professional student should have, inasmuch as most if not all of our graduate students are preparing for a profession—it yet seems manifest that a rigid division between undergraduates and graduates is not only desirable but necessary. The Johns Hopkins University as originally planned did this very thing. What militates against its realization at present in the opinion of the Committee, is, in large part at least, our present "course" or "credit" system.

To quote a passage from a letter of one of the Committee, himself an administrator, the situation may be summed up in these somewhat drastic terms:

The general tendency of the exaggeration of administration in American educational institutions is to treat a university like a factory. If we have got to choose I should be more inclined to say it should be treated like a monastery. At any rate, I am sure that so far as our graduate work is concerned we must be delivered from the mechanism of courses, office hours, and all that sort of thing, which belong to manufacturing institutions and not to institutions of learning.

Or as another member, also an administrator says:

Residence at a university should be defined in terms of attendance upon courses, but should imply no more than attendance and payment of fees. All course credits should be abolished, so that there will be no possibility of a student receiving a degree by the accumulation of such credits. . . . The scholarship requirements for the degree should be defined independently of the residence requirement. They should be defined in terms of the subject-matter.

Granted—but how can a reform here be brought about? Most of our administrators will say that the “course-credit” serves the useful purpose of estimating the degree of preparation and the type of information the student possesses or should possess, and that it is difficult to estimate this in any other way. Besides, it will be said that the individual professor is always free to make his own evaluation of the student’s ability—Independently of “course-credits”—and to communicate this information to others.

In reply to these objections, the Committee would point out that, admitting the correctness of the above contentions, it is nevertheless true that in the mind of the student the present “course” or “credit” system has taken on an importance quite out of proportion to its real value—at least for graduate work. It is in order to correct this attitude on the part of all concerned but especially the students, that the committee makes the following suggestion:

In each department of our universities there are two or three or more professors who direct research. Let these professors, singly or as a body, testify as to the student’s equipment, not on the basis of courses but with reference to the candidate’s intellectual promise as an investigator. The method by which this information is procured will necessarily vary: it may be obtained through formal examination, or by conferences with all the registered graduate students, or by some other means. The important thing is that a department, after a certain lapse of time—say a year as the minimum—should be prepared to say to the corresponding department in another university: so-and-so is or is not in our opinion fitted to do research work. The committee admits that in many cases this procedure, or what amounts to it, is already in practice. But the point is, and on this the Committee is a unit, it is not the officially recognized procedure, and that it ought to be. In this way, and only in this way, will it become the rule to consider graduate work in terms of mental attainment and promise and not as a mere matter of courses passed or failed.

Believing that this reform is capable of realization, the Committee thinks further that the research student, once accepted as such, should be granted greater freedom to choose his courses than other students. If this is the general practice in some universities, it is not the case or only in part the case in others. As to the library in particular, where the research student should be given every possible facility, much improvement along specific lines is doubtless still possible. The Committee assumes that Committee V (On Apparatus for Productive Scholarship) will deal with the library question. At the same time, we would point out that the research student should have ready access to the shelves; that he should have a study- or work-table next to the books, and that, as one member of the Committee suggests, the university librarians should seek to establish—perhaps through the Carnegie Institution—“some central bureau of information through which one might easily find out if and where in the United States a given book is to be found.” Our present library exchange, helpful as it is, does not and cannot provide this feature, which in itself would greatly facilitate our research work. Material is available to show that in general our university libraries could more effectively than at present serve the special university needs. A university library is a public institution in a restricted sense only. It fulfils its purpose best when it provides the means for specialist work. It should, therefore, contribute in every manner possible to further investigation in those subjects for which the university stands. And this is possible only if our library staffs possess a real knowledge of books, of bibliographical aids, of the resources of the library itself, and a disposition to place them at the service of the investigator under the most favorable conditions, over and above the attention and the energy now devoted to cataloging and preserving the acquisitions that the library makes. A university library, it may be said, is a “workshop” and not primarily a system of catalogs or a repository of printed material.

As to the question of publication, here again Committee V will doubtless have useful things to say. On our part we would suggest that the channels of publication could be greatly improved in two directions:

(1) By strengthening the support of existing journals of recognized merit. This could be done by direct subsidy in certain fields, either from several universities as a group or from several learned bodies working in co-operation; and

(2) By the franker recognition on the part of the Carnegie Institution of research in the field of the humanities. Much would be gained if this body would publish a series of treatises or articles too long for our journals to publish and too unremunerative for the general trade. Or, if the Carnegie Institution is unavailable, then the separate university presses might combine in order to subsidize and publish such series. Moreover, the “miscellaneous” type of

publication now maintained by some of our universities might thus be discontinued and the funds set free thereby devoted to this central agency, which would operate under proper editorial supervision.

In conclusion, the Committee makes the following recommendations:

(1) That the universities be asked to recognize their research students—that is, their graduate students whose capacity for research has been tested and approved—as a distinctive group, to be designated as such. This need not imply that other students should be excluded from research courses. On the contrary, such courses must be readily accessible for the purpose of testing the student's ability. At the same time, there should be a clear-cut division between those students whose capacity is admitted and those whose capacity is still untried.

(2) That for such students a statement of knowledge and ability—like the French *certificat d'aptitude*—be issued through the graduate dean by the department in which the student is doing research work, this statement to be given preference over the present system of "course-credits," which for purely administrative reasons can hardly be abolished but to which less importance should be attached.

(3) That in universities in which it is not yet the case, such students be accorded practically the same library and laboratory facilities as the professors with whom they are working—including in each case a study-table in the library. That, further, the university libraries be urged to give greater attention to the special needs of research students, in such a way that the libraries shall be administered in behalf of investigators rather than of the general reader.

(4) That the media of publication be strengthened in the directions indicated above.

The Committee has purposely approached the question of research from the point of view of the student and the facilities offered him for work. There remains the fundamental question of research in relation to the professor, which the Committee feels is equally important. But as this involves the problem of a better classification of professors into various groups, the research and the teaching types, and the further distinction between genuine universities and those that are mainly or entirely professional schools, involving also the important matter of promotions and salaries, it was deemed advisable to leave the question of research as regards the professor for a later more detailed report. For the present at least, it will be admitted that if the facilities for research are improved along the lines treated in the report the position of the professor engaged in research will necessarily be bettered. And from this it will be but a step to proceed to a fuller recognition of the just claims of the research professor, both in respect to opportunity for work and to

adequate recognition by way of promotion and salary. So, too, an improved method of assigning "fellowships" could be worked out in connection with the above plan, but with this the Committee did not feel called upon to deal at present.*

The Committee:

E. C. ARMSTRONG, Princeton University
CARL BECKER, Cornell University
MAURICE BLOOMFIELD, Johns Hopkins University
A. C. L. BROWN, Northwestern University
A. R. HOHLFELD, University of Wisconsin
E. P. LEWIS, University of California
J. L. LOWES, Harvard University
F. C. NEWCOMBE, University of Michigan
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ROScoe POUND, Harvard University
C. C. TORREY, Yale University
F. J. E. WOODBRIDGE, Columbia University
WM. A. NITZE, University of Chicago, *Chairman.*

* The discussion of the report at the Baltimore meeting by Professor Lovejoy brought out a point which it seems wise to comment on here. Mr. Lovejoy said: "If we are to maintain anything that genuinely deserves the name of graduate work we must set ourselves rigorously against a tendency to which many institutions are tempted—that of having sham graduate schools. We ought to make clear to executive boards of all institutions that profess to carry on graduate work for more than a year or two, that such work, honestly done, means having a special faculty devoted exclusively, or almost exclusively, to graduate instruction and research; and we should emphatically urge that this kind of work should be attempted only by universities having funds and equipment sufficient to enable them to carry it on in this manner." This idea is voiced also by at least two members of the Committee. Professor Oldfather says: "An effort might well be made to define a 'standard' graduate school, as a standard college and a standard high school have recently been defined. This should tend to concentrate graduate instruction at the points where it can be conducted effectively, and should discourage institutions with inadequate resources from professing to give graduate instruction." And Professor Hohlfeld writes: "I should like to see a suggestion that we have *far too many* institutions attempting to make Ph.D.'s. If we had twenty or even twenty-five real universities carrying their students to a Ph.D. degree whereas the others were satisfied to have *strong* M.A. courses, we should be infinitely better off. And until we have a clearer classification of institutions and professors, all attempts to emphasize research may do more harm than good. The very men and institutions that ought to do strong, effective teaching (by no means only 'informational' in character) will, I fear, be the first to try to prove their belonging to the select by going off on the research tangent."

The idea involved in these suggestions if carried out would require: (1) a survey of existing universities with reference to research facilities; (2) a classification of such universities as fit or unfit to give graduate instruction, in all departments or in some departments; (3) the acceptance by the universities of the results of the survey and the fuller recognition by them of "graduate schools," as distinct in aims and methods from their "colleges" and "professional schools."